

Best Interest School Selection

The McKinney-Vento Act provides a child or youth identified as homeless the right to attend either the school of origin or the local school, according to the child or youth's best interest. The school of origin is the school that the child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child was last enrolled, including a preschool. The local school is any public school that housed students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is currently residing are eligible to attend. Local educational agencies (LEAs) must make best interest determinations about school selection that:

- presume that staying in the school of origin is in the best interest of the child or youth;
- consider specific student-centered factors (such as transportation, social & emotional state, age, academics)
- prioritize the wishes of the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth; and
- include a written explanation and notice of the right to appeal if the LEA determines that remaining in the school of origin is not in the best interest of the child or youth.

LEA homeless liaisons and other school personnel play a critical role in helping parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness evaluate the best interest. This document provides a guide for school selection conversations with parents and guardians. Involving parents and guardians fully in the school selection process can reduce the likelihood of disputes or unnecessary school changes and respect the role of parents and guardians in their child's education.

Step One: Explain the rights and significance of school selection

Thank the parents/guardians for speaking with you and let them know that while it is the LEA's responsibility to determine the best school placement for their child, the LEA must prioritize school stability and the parents'/guardians' wishes. You are here to support them in this process. As appropriate, acknowledge the challenges of the family's living circumstances and the importance of making sure that their child is in a school setting that supports his or her academic success and overall well-being during this difficult time.

Step Two: Help the parents/guardians consider their options

Explain to the parents/guardians that you can help them consider whether the school of origin or local school would best meet their child's current needs by asking them a few important questions. See the attached school selection checklist. Remind the parents/guardians that they may change their wishes about school placement later if their housing circumstances or priorities change or if their child's needs change.

Use the following steps when determining the best interest:

- Step 1:** Explain the rights and significance of school selection.
- Step 2:** Help the parents/ guardians consider options.
- Step 3:** Ensure continuity of instruction in the current school or a smooth.
- Step 4:** Utilize the checklist below to help guide the discussion and decision-making process.

School Selection: A Checklist for Decision-Making

School of Origin Considerations		Local School Considerations	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Continuity of Instruction The student would be served best at the school of origin due to circumstances that look to his or her past.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Continuity of Instruction The student would be served best at the local school due to circumstances that look to his or her future.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Age and Grade Placement of the Student Maintaining friends and contacts with peers is critical to the student's meaningful school experience and participation. The student has been in this environment for an extended period of time.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Age and Grade Placement of the Student Maintaining friends and contacts with peers in the school of origin is not particularly critical to the student's meaningful school experience and participation. The student has attended the school of origin for only a brief time.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Academic Strength The student's academic performance is weak, and the student would fall further behind if he/she transferred to another school.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Academic Strength The student's academic performance is strong and at grade level, and the student would likely recover academically from a school transfer.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Social and Emotional State The student is suffering from the effects of mobility, has developed strong ties to the current school, and does not want to leave.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Social and Emotional State The student seems to be coping adequately with mobility, does not feel strong ties to the current school, and does not mind transferring.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Distance of the Commute and its Impact on the Student's Education The advantages of continuing to attend the school of origin outweigh any potential disadvantages presented by the length of the commute.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Distance of the Commute and its Impact on the Student's Education A shorter commute may help the student's concentration, attitude, or readiness for school. The local school can meet all of the necessary educational and special needs of the student.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Personal Safety of the Student The school of origin has advantages for the safety of the student.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Personal Safety of the Student The local school has advantages for the safety of the student.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Student's Need for Special Instruction The student's need for special instruction, such as Section 504 or special education and related services, can be met better at the school of origin.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Student's Need for Special Instruction The student's need for special instruction, such as Section 504 or special education and related services, can be met better at the local attendance area school.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Length of Anticipated Stay in a Temporary Shelter or Other Temporary Location The student's current living situation is outside of the school of origin's attendance zone, but his/her living situation or location continues to be uncertain. The student will benefit from the continuity offered by continuing to attend the school of origin.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Length of Anticipated Stay in a Temporary Shelter or Other Temporary Location The student's current living situation appears stable and unlikely to change suddenly; the student will benefit from developing relationships with school peers who live in his or her local community.</p>